

Critics hail

Chgo. Daily News, Wed., Sept. 8, 1971

symphony:

'best in U.S.'

By Bernard Jacobson
Daily News Music Critic

EDINBURGH, Scotland —

The Chicago Symphony brought the second stage of its first European tour to a triumphant conclusion here Tuesday night with another sparkling concert under principal guest conductor Carlo Maria Giulini.

The orchestra has now hit its stride.

Brahm's Tragic Overture, Haydn's "Surprise" symphony and Ravel's "Rapsodie Espagnole" were all, in their widely differing styles, beautifully and idiomatically played, and

shared a warm ovation with the excellent soloist, Rafael Orozco.

THE CRITICAL response continues overwhelmingly favorable. The important London Times described the Chicago Symphony as "the United States' most completely accomplished orchestra," and the Evening News spoke of "a truly great orchestra . . . revealing artistic and unanimous strengths in every department, all in nice balance."

Now the players fly to Belgium, where they will give concerts in Ghent and Brussels.

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Symphony Wins Ovation in Belgium

By Bernard Jacobson
BRUSSELS — The Chicago Symphony's brief foray through Belgium has been reminiscent of an ancient Roman triumph in the way it has leavened solid professional achievement with moments of comedy or even farce.

Fortunately, the farce came first. "Royal Opera House" sounded a promising enough name for the building in Ghent where the orchestra was to make its Flanders Festival debut Thursday—and certainly the anterooms and buffet were palatial enough.

BUT SUCH trifling matters as adequate dressing rooms turned out not to be among the 130-year-old hall's amenities, and so the players, after an hour's bus ride out from Brussels, had to change in an enormous barn on the other side of town before they were ferried on to the Opera House, leaving a trail of astonished residents along the narrow streets through which their four buses thundered.

Orchestral players seem curiously lacking in a sense of adventure. At least, makeshift arrangements like these bring out all their quirkiness. Still, the tour had been going so smoothly up to this point that many of the members grinned and bore it, and their animal imitations in the barn were raucous enough to drown out the complaints.

Rather harder to take as a joke were the cramped stage of the 1,400-seat auditorium and its disastrously muffled acoustics.

IN THE circumstances, it would have been unrealistic to expect an immaculate performance. But the orchestra never plays badly for Gijndhi, and Mozart's 39th Symphony went well enough to win a resounding standing ovation.

What pleasure it is to encounter an audience that listens in rapt silence while the music is playing, and when it rises to its feet at the end of

the concert, does so for another purpose than rushing off to catch the train home.

Gijndhi responded with Rossini's "Semiramide" overture by way of an encore. This was kinder to the audience than to the orchestra, since the brass section in particular had shot its bolt in the Mahler Symphony No. 1. But once again he repeated his extraordinary feat of making this convivial

work sound like a masterpiece of subtle elegance.

ON THE NEXT night, the scene shifted to the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels. This, though an ugly hall, is a thoroughly well-equipped one with superb acoustics. And now, with the tension of the European debut left behind in Edinburgh, the orchestra gave music director Georg Solti the

kind of playing he gets from it back in Chicago.

The program was the Elliott Carter Variations and Mahler's Fifth Symphony, and both works were given stunning performances. Brilliant playing earned solo bows for principal horn Dale Clevenger and principal trumpet Adolph Herseth. The audience again stood in tribute.

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*Belgians Cheer
Our Orchestra*

BY THOMAS WILLIS

Brussels, Belgium

• THE PALAIS des Beaux Arts is no palace and its Grand Salle no great hall despite the name, but the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Georg

Music

Solti had the audience there standing and cheering Friday night. The 2,000-seat auditorium is part of a grey, unified monster containing five stages, concert halls and recital salons, suggesting that the Kennedy Center's edifice complex may be traced back at least two generations. The hall itself is oval and flat-topped, with a lot of air space for the sound to boom around in and unbroken plaster walls for obvious reflection. The acoustic result is maximum bass response, good reinforcement of strings and brass and occasionally submerged winds.

There also were a few more ragged edges in the performance than there had been in the Edinburgh versions of these same works—the Elliott Carter Variations for Orchestra and Mahler's Fifth Symphony—but with Gent's Opera House still fresh in ear and nose, I am not about to complain too strongly.

Neither were the local newspaper critics. Jacques Stehman of the leading French language daily, *Le Soir*, called the ensemble "an amazing orchestra, without

any doubt one of the most brilliant in the world, the prestige previously demonstrated on records now has been confirmed."

Max van der Maesbrugge of the *Le Dernier Heure* enthused: "What a splendid ensemble, for everybody is a prodigious master of his technique. The entire orchestra has amazing discipline: that the musicians care to give their utmost is exceptional." And the anonymous critic of *Gent's Het Volk*, writing about Thursday's concert, praised the symphony's "fine phrasing, brilliant orchestral color and enormous competence."

Following Friday's concert, there was a reception for the players, staff and visiting Orchestral Association officials in Brussels' 13th century city hall. The reception was sponsored by the State of Illinois European Office and the Illinois Business community in Belgium. In the receiving line were John S. D. Eisenhower, United States ambassador to Belgium; Arthur A. Compton, European director of the Illinois Department of Business and Economic Development; Piere van Halteren, alderman for fine arts of the city of Brussels; and Louis C. Sudler, president of the Orchestral Association.

After the party Mr. and Mrs. Solti left for Montreux, Switz., where Mr. Solti was to receive the Montreux International Recording Award at a dinner yesterday evening.

(Chicago Tribune Press Service)

German Audience Symphony's Largest

BY THOMAS WILLIS
[Music Editor]

(Chicago Tribune Press Service)

HOECHST, Germany, Sept. 18—The largest audience to date on the Chicago Symphony Orchestra's European tour shouted and stamped their approval until long after conductor Georg Solti had motioned the men from the stage at the Jahrhunderthalle here tonight.

This convention hall, which resembles a smaller, more elegant version of the domed University of Illinois Assembly hall is across the street from the plant of the giant I.G. Farben Chemical Works. The concert tonight was partially underwritten by the firm, which built the hall at its centennial celebration 10 years ago, televised for future release.

Concert Televised

The concert was also being stage temperature, making exact intonation difficult and causing the perspiration to flow freely. An ugly plywood acoustic shell, streaked with gray and black to soften the video impression, surrounded the ensemble.

For the men who had left their hotel in Stockholm early this morning, checked into a downtown Frankfurt hotel in the early afternoon, ridden by bus to the hall, rehearsed with the camera crews for an hour and barely had time to tie their white ties before concert time, it must have been a draining experience.

The fatigue did not show in the performance, however. Mendelssohn's overture to "A Midsummer Night's Dream", Bartok's Music for Strings, Percussion and Celeste, and the Tchaikovsky Sixth Symphony being played for the first time on the tour were sharply etched and exciting.

Poor Acoustics

Nobody will rave about the acoustics in this booming, mushroom eating hall. And, anyone familiar with the orchestra's sound in better surroundings knows that this wasn't as good.

But the "Pathetique" was a model of its kind, nonsentimental and burnished to white heat. The audience ate it up, and gave Mr. Solti, who was a major figure in musical Frankfurt from 1952 to 1961, a warm, enthusiastic homecoming.

Stockholm critics were a little more reserved in their praise than their colleagues earlier elsewhere in the tour. The least favorable characterized the symphony as "a stable weekday orchestra; the precision is good, the poise is there; the orchestra's tone is pure, strong, clear and composed in

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apologized in one way or another for the cramped quarters and poor acoustics in the Folket Hus Hall. One critic wished that the concert could have been broadcast for all of Sweden to hear.

Thoughtful Comment

The most thoughtful and interesting comments came from Carl-Gunnar Ahlen in the Svenska Dagbladet. Under the headline, "Hot Chicago Musicians", he wrote in part: "This is a wonderful, thoroely engaging orchestra, a really charming group of individualists.

Even tho the orchestra gives everything it has, the tone is never coarse or rough over the whole scale of values from the airiest pianissimo to the most manly fortissimo, the violin tone maintains its silken

sheen."

As far as I could tell from a seat three rows from the string bases, Thursday night's Stockholm performance went much better. Another reviewer, presumably sitting in the local press seats, reported that the Bartok "Demonstrated superior instrumental mastery; every category has a seldom heard solidity and density of sound. We wonder how it is possible to reach such beauty. It was an altogether brilliant beginning of our symphony season."

Last night the Chicago Symphony's String Quartet visited the industrial suburb of Soderstalje, a 25 mile journey from central Stockholm. The moonlighting ensemble—Victor Aitay, Edgar Muenzer, Milton

Preves and Frank Miller—acquitted itself well, particularly in the energetic Walter Piston String Quartet. This time the headline read: "Kvartett Med Guldlang. "That's what you get for working on a night off —"The Sound of Gold."

Chicago Sun-Times, Fri., Sept. 24, 1971

Solti, Symphony triumph in 2d Berlin concert

By Robert C. Marsh

Sun-Times Music Critic

BERLIN—The Chicago Symphony has known some great nights in its 80 years, not a few of them recently, but after its second Berlin concert Wednesday evening one had the sense that its musical stature had been amply demonstrated in a program that would be long remembered and long discussed by all who heard it or who participated in its realization.

On this occasion the conductor was Georg Solti, and in general he chose to underplay the music of the evening, stressing the delicate interplay of tone color in a really quiet passage over the brute force of decibels.

Not that the decibels were lacking. The third movement of the Tchaikovsky "Pathetique" Symphony, with the matchless combination of the acoustics of the Berlin Philharmonic and the Chicago brass, produced an outburst of applause from even a sophisticated German audience.

BUT THIS was a well-calculated effect, a high point carefully chosen and carefully scaled into the musical development of the evening. Solti does not believe in shooting off cannon if he can get the same results with a whisper.

Thus he opened the evening with Mendelssohn's Overture to "A Midsummer Night's Dream," stressing the sense of fantasy that fills the music, the joy and magic that mark the play, and providing that the Chicago players could maintain beautifully flowing, uniform rhythms in a quick tempo while at the same time producing the softest and most refined sounds imaginable.

The Philharmonie proved to be the ideal place to hear Bartok's Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta, since the near-perfect sound reflection qualities of the stage brought out the antiphonal effects, the musical questions and answers across the stage, in a manner the composer might have imagined but, one suspects, rarely if ever heard.

IN THIS MUSIC the lyric quality of Bartok's writing is never very far away, but at the same time he is fascinated with the possibilities of rhythm, especially when metrical patterns are formed from sound sources distributed over a large stage area. One could not help but notice the immediate response of the musicians to the clarity and precision of Solti's beat. The rhythmic designs were strong and precise, yet always musical rather than mechanical in feeling.

NORMALLY one does not think of the "Pathetique" as an orchestral showpiece, but Solti made it one, proving once more that a conductor can secure a grand reception with a symphony that ends quietly provided the performance has been the kind to win ovations. This was Tchaikovsky without crocodile tears.

The soaring melodic phrases of the first movement were impassioned but controlled. The second movement sang its song above a quiet heartbeat in the timpani, opening the way to the march movement that set the air crackling. But Solti knew better than to let the work reach dramatic fulfillment before its true close, and the drama of the final adagio lamentoso, with its dark phrases spinning away softly into silence, was the resolution of the work.

Symphony sweets on target in Vienna

By Robert C. Marsh
Sun-Times Music Critic

VIENNA — Walk through the heart of Vienna and nearly every block or so you will see a pastry shop with a window full of sweets of every description.

And many of the Viennese appear to like their music in the same manner, stuffed with butterfat and carbohydrates. Carlo Maria Giulini and the Chicago Symphony gave them that Sunday night in the Grosser Musikvereins-Saal, in a concert that seemed to contain about 1,000 calories a second in tonal opulence.

They loved it. Indeed, Giulini's reception at the end appeared to exceed that which Georg Solti had received the night before for an extraordinarily well-played program of Bartok and Mahler.

THIS, I SUSPECT, tells us something about Vienna: Its sensuality must never be forgotten; moreover, this pleasure-seeking is carried out in a most conservative manner, respecting established standards of self-indulgence. Thus Giulini's relatively unimaginative Berlioz-Haydn-Stravinsky program was more readily assimilated than Bartok (still somewhat radical) and Mahler in the uncompromising mood of the Fifth Symphony.

Giulini's concert set of orchestral excerpts from Berlioz' "Romeo and Juliet" is effective as a sequence of lyric and dramatic pages and finds a rousing conclusion in the ball scene at the Capulet's home, but as a representation of Berlioz's dramatic symphony it is quite inadequate. There are no vocal passages, and the se-

quence of the excerpts has been changed.

The love (that is, balcony) scene, for example, comes before the Capulet ball, something quite at odds with Shakespeare.

The heaviness which I thought had marred some of Giulini's previous presentations of this music was not present on this occasion, and in the truly exceptional acoustic setting of the Musikverein the transparency and brilliant color values of the Berlioz orchestration was beautifully set forth to the glory of the conductor and his players.

IN THE HAYDN "Surprise" Symphony, Giulini offered one of his neo-Furtwaengler performances, considerably slower than his recording, and highly inflected and underlined in a very emotional approach.

Purists might well claim that this is precisely the way a Haydn symphony should not be played, but if one is willing to take this as a romantic interpretation, on its own musical terms, it was unusually well done and achieved with a consistency in style and viewpoint from start to finish.

The opening of the Internal Dance in Stravinsky's "Fire-bird Suite" seemed to bring the entire audience to attention. Giulini exploited the acoustics of the hall to produce some unusually lovely, quieter playing in the opening movements of the suite, but the Infernal Dance and Finales became massive display pieces for Chicago Symphony virtuosity, producing an ovation that stopped only when the "Semitramide" Overture of Rossini was offered as an encore.

Our Orchestra Praised in Milan

BY THOMAS WILLIS

Milan, Italy

THE PRESS reaction to Georg Solti and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra's first engagement at the Teatro Alla Scala here has been unexpectedly unanimous. Long strings of adjectives in the six Milanese newspapers

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praised the ensemble this morning. Even the usually unflappable Corriere Della Sera critic, Franco Abbiati, said the orchestra played "divinely. All shades of sonority and characterization were marvelously articulated, section by section, instrument by instrument, clear as crystal, splendid as soloists, with perfect control of all ranges of intensity, crescendo and diminuendo, from loudest to softest, thruout the entire expressive range."

There was no disagreement at all on the quality of the orchestra or the ability of Mr. Solti as the conductor. Guilio Confaloniere, the respected music historian and reviewer for Il Giorno, said the conductor conquered the audience with his energy, capacity to command, sense of fantasy, and "footwork more agile than the pugilist, Monzon." Benjamino de Fabblo, the third of the city's triumvirate of best known critics, said in today's Il Giornale Mondiale that "there is a danger that orchestras of such ability may attain too much polish, creating a sort of technicolor phonorama of externals instead of serving the music. This the Chicago Symphony has avoided."

Even the Communist daily, Il Unita, was equally enthusiastic about the "warm kneading of sounds and the Mediterranean sweetness of the strings," calling the concert "magnificent performance" and "enthusiastically

successful." There was only one fault, the critic concluded, no encore. "In the case of new orchestras at La Scala, this is always done [we hope Mr. Solti will remember this in the future]."

At last night's performance, the second of the three identical concerts here, Mr. Solti did indeed play the Overture to "The Barber of Seville" as an encore. As noted by the reviewers who attended Monday night, the Mendelssohn-Bartok-Brahms program was a most successful recipe for success reports from those present both times said that the old-time subscribers who attended last night clapped a little less than Monday's audience. To this reviewer, sitting in a center box in the second rank, it was Mr. Solti's best performance of the tour—relaxed, firmly in control and aware of the interacting needs of players, audience and hall.

(Chicago Tribune Press Service)

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Paris hall can't dim our orchestra

By Robert C. Marsh
Sun-Times Music Critic

PARIS — According to one theory, French bread tastes the way it does because of French flour, rather than anything occult in the recipe. And after hearing the Chicago Symphony in the Theater of the Palais de Chaillot Saturday night, one is faced with the disconcerting thought that French orchestras sound the way they do because of French concert halls.

For Jean Martinon labored for five years to get a proper French sound from the Chicago ensemble, and never in that time did he achieve the quality the orchestra revealed in this program directed by Georg Solti. The trouble is, I don't think Solti was even striving for a markedly French sound. It just came out that way.

This concert room is one of the deadest acoustically I have ever heard. Even the biggest orchestral climax vanishes instantaneously, and in the Bartok Concerto for Orchestra I had the impression that the Chicago players were encased in a huge padded box that not only swallowed up low frequencies with an insatiable appetite but took all the body and character out of their distinctive tone.

I WOULD NEVER have recognized this as the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. But, despite this loss of identity, the effect was pleasing and, it should be stressed, the Paris audience (heavily weighted with young people) was rapturously enthusiastic, applauding in heavy rhythmic cadences after the Bartok.

Further vigorous response followed the First Symphony of Brahms.

What happened is that every tone was reduced to its fundamentals. The high overtones so characteristic of the Chicago orchestra that give color and strength to its sound, simply were not projected with any force, so the sound became extremely lean and clear with

unusual colorings like filtered light. Another major factor was the lack of bass. Normally one takes for granted that the Chicago orchestra produces a lot of low frequency tone from its violas, cellos, and basses, and when this drops in intensity (when even the timpani are thinned out) the entire tonal balance is altered severely.

The way things went, the Mendelssohn Overture to a Midsummer Nights Dream" was quite effective, lightly scored music that seemed to drift into the auditorium as a sort of haze of sound. It was very delicate, and Solti's stress on the interplay of line and color was most effective.

THEN CAME the Bartok. If one had heard the Milan performance, you never would have guessed it was the same orchestra or the same tour. Everything was different. It was interesting. An experience which one thought one could anticipate and which turned out to be something entirely unexpected, but as a realization of Bartok's score it lacked the weight of registration I consider essential in this music.

The Brahms was beautifully played. Its repetitions in recent days have brought refinement to a performance that already possessed aristocratic character. But this is a symphony in which climactic pages must be permitted to build onward and upward, which means the orchestral tone must be supported by a reasonable amount of resonance in the hall. When this does not happen, as was the case here, a major effect is lost.

The result is that the Chicago players won a significant success in the French capital and, paradoxically, they did so with the least satisfying concerts of those I have heard on the tour. But the shortcomings of the evening were entirely due to the hall rather than the musicians. And even the intensity of Solti's direction could carry them only so far.